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ABSTRACT

Since 1996, states have been responsible for moving people from the welfare rolls into jobs. The results have been mixed, and states are still struggling to find the right combination of programs to help individuals and families make that transition. Most people agree that it is best if they find jobs, but not everyone has the skills to land jobs, and even people with skills sometimes lack transportation and/or child care. As a result, many questions are still confounding the nation as the transition from welfare to work continues. This National Issues Forums (NIF) issue booklet gives an overview of the issue and outlines three perspectives for public deliberation. Perspectives are: (1) "Everyone Should Work" (everyone should work regardless of skill and ability); (2) "Help Those Who Can't Work" (it is unrealistic that everyone work); and (3) "Prepare Productive Citizens" (address first the social problems that keep people poor and unskilled). Each perspective contains arguments for and against the perspective, and a final summary compares the three perspectives. (Contains sample pre-forum and post-forum questionnaires.) (BT)

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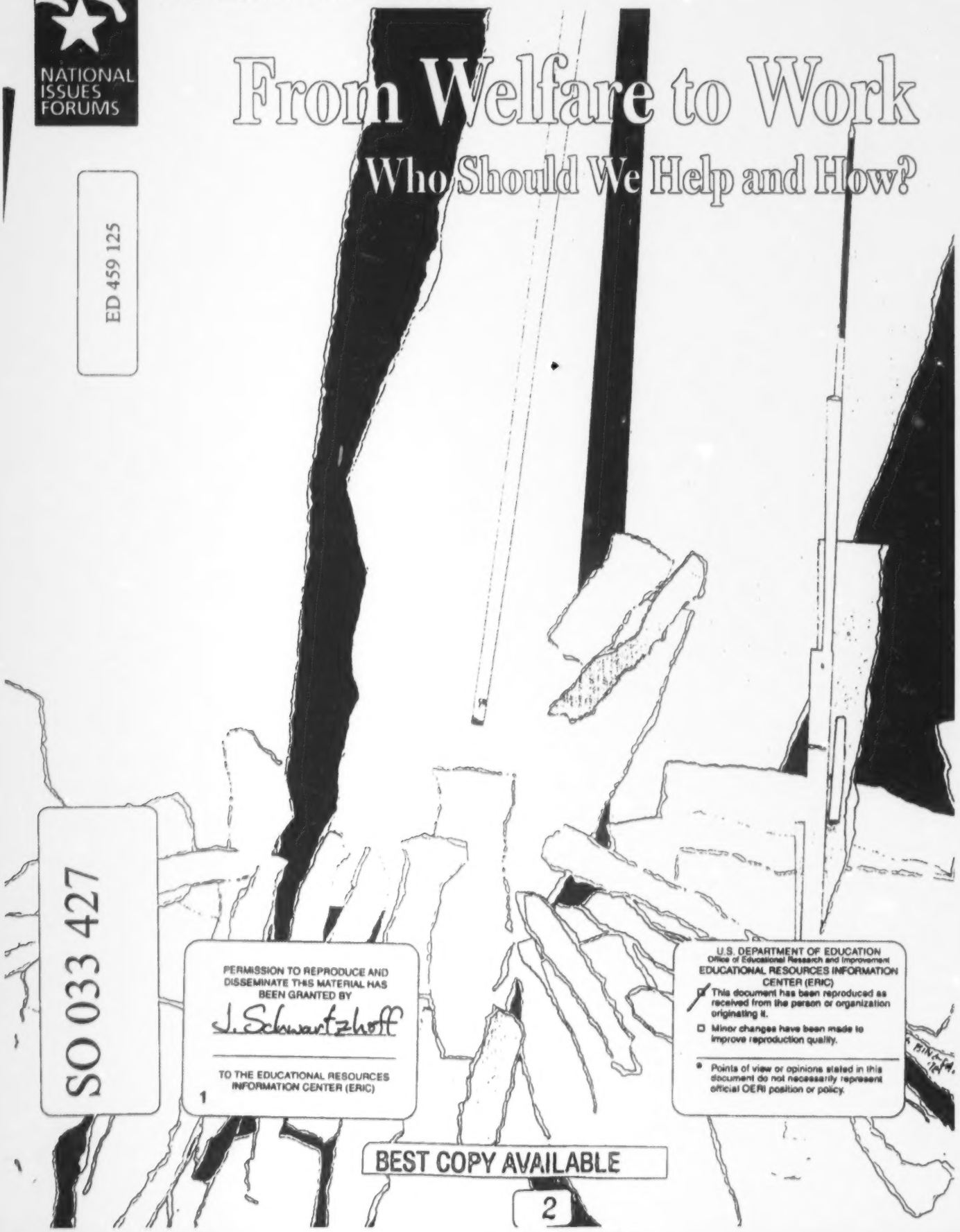
NATIONAL ISSUES FORUMS

An Issue Book for National Issues Forums

From Welfare to Work

Who Should We Help and How?

ED 459 125



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NATIONAL ISSUES FORUMS

A note about this issue book

Each book in this series for the National Issues Forums outlines an issue and several approaches or choices for public action. Rather than conforming to any single public proposal, each choice reflects widely held concerns and principles. A range of experts review manuscripts to make sure the choices are presented accurately and fairly. By intention, issue books do not identify individuals or organizations with partisan labels such as Democrat, Republican, conservative, or liberal. The goal is to present ideas in a fresh way that encourages readers to judge them on their merit. Issue books include quotations from experts and public officials when their views appear consistent with the principles of a choice. But these quoted individuals might not endorse every aspect of a choice as it is described here.

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By Tony Wharton, Myrne Roe

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Since 1996, states have been responsible for moving people off of welfare rolls and into jobs. But the results have been mixed, and states are still struggling to find the right combination of programs to help individuals and families make that transition. Most people agree it's best if they find jobs, but not everyone has the skills to find jobs, and even people who do sometimes lack transportation or child care. As a result, many questions still confound us as we continue the transition from welfare to work. As with other NIF issue books, this one gives an overview of this issue and outlines several commonly held perspectives, or choices, for public deliberation.

Choice 1 **Everyone Should Work** 7

Supporters of this choice believe so strongly in the value of work that they would even create jobs for people who once received welfare, no matter what their skills and abilities. In their view, everyone should play a part: local, state, and federal governments; corporations; nonprofit organizations; and individual citizens.

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Choice 2 **Help Those Who Can't Work** 12

Supporters of this choice argue it's unrealistic to insist that everyone work. Living among us are truly needy people who just can't work and care for themselves, the supporters of this choice say, and we must provide the means for them to live in dignity. We may need to better regulate who receives welfare, they say, but we should not eliminate it.

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Choice 3 **Prepare Productive Citizens** 17

Those who support this choice believe we cannot address the problem of work versus public assistance unless we address first the deeper social issues that keep people poor and unskilled. They believe that, if we renew our efforts to prevent poverty, we can reduce the need for welfare. We can do this by investing in education, families, and early childhood programs that help prepare young people to be productive citizens.

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What Are the National Issues Forums?

From Welfare to Work

Who Should We Help and How?

L. Regan, Liaison Agency, Inc.

Job training programs have been a part of many states' efforts to help people make the transition from welfare to work.

The old system of welfare is slowly disappearing. Government agencies began phasing it out in the 1990s after many Americans became convinced that federal welfare programs, which for decades had provided aid to low-income families, were being abused and no longer served their original purpose.

Democrats and Republicans united in 1996 to pass legislation that would do away with these programs. Since then, states have been responsible for moving people off of welfare rolls and into jobs. A federal waiver system had allowed states to experiment with welfare reform before that, and 43 states did so. Now, most are still working toward finding programs, or combinations of programs, that work.

Most states still provide monetary aid for limited periods of time, so long as recipients get training or look for work. Some have created public service jobs where former welfare recipients can get job experience while earning their benefits — an approach called "workfare."

On the national level, some legislators are pushing for charity tax credits as a way to encourage nonprofit organizations to do more to help low-income families.

Many Americans hope these changes will break what they see as the cycle of dependency among the poor — a cycle in which dependence on aid shifts from temporary to habitual. They believe that long-term reliance on aid undermines the values of hard work and independence in individual families.

Some people think it's a good idea to shift the burden of caring for them away from the federal government. They believe we can find a better formula that includes federal, state, and local governments, the private sector, and individual citizens.

Others feel we need to severely limit the number of people who receive aid — or even stop providing government aid altogether. They believe that encouraging individual self-reliance and "taking care of our own" at the local level is the best way to make our country, its communities, and its citizens strong.

At the heart of the conversation are two conflicting but deeply held beliefs: It's important to both society and to us as individuals to be self-sufficient and contribute to society, but it's also important for us, as a society, to help people whose ability to do that has been limited, eliminated, or temporarily lessened by factors outside of their control.

Perhaps that is why, in the often harsh rhetoric about welfare, many people feel the welfare system failed both society and those it was meant to help.

The solution of putting people to work seems simple enough. But when the question arises as to who can work and who can't, it quickly becomes complicated.

Americans, then, are struggling with questions like:

- Who is able to work? Who is not? And how should we make that distinction?
- Do we have enough jobs for people who can work?
- How do we increase the opportunities for everyone, and help them take advantage of those opportunities?
- How much should we help poor people, and how?
- How can we provide a hand up to the truly unfortunate, yet keep people from becoming dependent on handouts?
- If we decide to help, who should shoulder the burden? Families? Government? Business and industry? Churches and charities?

Some are concerned about young children, who by law cannot work. Others worry about the disabled, the mentally ill, and other vulnerable members of our society who cannot work. They fear that some of them will fall through the cracks and have much-needed benefits taken away.

Soon, we will reach the deadlines on benefits imposed by the 1996 legislation, and we must be ready.

As the government makes the transition out of welfare, reports about how it's going are constantly changing and often point out mixed results. A March 1998 article in *USA Today* said that slightly more than half the people who stopped receiving welfare after the law changed had found jobs. Most were earning about $6 per

Current Welfare Law

Welfare in America is now designed and run by state and local governments. Cash aid is temporary and tied to finding work.

The federal government pays between 50 and 80 percent of welfare costs, depending on the states, in the form of block grants. Each state may use the money as it sees fit to implement welfare policy changes and make welfare-to-work a reality.

A five-year lifetime limit has been placed on aid to adults, with some exceptions for the aged and disabled. After five years, children can still get some aid, but their caregivers cannot.

Adults in families receiving aid are required to either work or enroll in a welfare-to-work activity such as job training. The goal is for 50 percent of welfare recipients to be working by the year 2002.

Some states have created public service jobs to put welfare recipients to work until regular jobs become available. These may include such things as picking up trash in a park and along roadways. Several states have made local governments responsible for implementing the new law.

The history of government benefits in America

1820s:

Government-funded, no-frills poorhouses were created for those who could not find jobs. Residents worked for their keep. Asylums were created for people with physical and mental disabilities.

1870s - 1890s:

Poorhouses became overcrowded after the Civil War and during economic depressions in 1873 and 1893. Poorhouses were deemed to be a failure and reform was called for.

1890s:

African-Americans and minorities, who were not eligible for assistance, began to form ghettoes in the northern cities.

1903:

Public spending on social welfare began to change from direct benefits to the poor to hiring social workers and expanding local welfare agencies.

1929:

The Great Depression threw nearly one-fourth of the labor force — about one million people — out of work.

1930s:

During the 1930s, 35 percent of the population received public aid or social insurance. By 1930, America had a total of 31,241 social workers and 45 social work schools.

1933:

To address the economic crisis set off by the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt initiated his "New Deal," which included several programs. The Federal Emergency Relief Administration channeled $500 million to the poor through local relief agencies. Millions of people got jobs with work relief programs, replanting forests, doing flood control work, helping with other public works projects of the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Works Progress Administration, and the Civil Works Administration.

1939:

Welfare spending hit a peak of $46.6 billion, or $1,419 per person, compared to $813 million before the Great Depression (adjusted into 1993 dollars), according to a 1996 report by the Heritage Foundation. World War II began in Europe.

1941:

The United States entered World War II. Several New Deal agencies were abolished, greatly reducing public spending on aid. At the same time, the war generated enough jobs that America experienced full employment.

1950s and 1960s:

In 1950, total welfare spending by federal, state, and local governments was $18.8 billion (in 1993 dollars). Spending on public assistance then grew slowly.

Wide World Photos

hour in retail and service industry jobs. But the same article said about one-fifth of the people who had found jobs returned to welfare within three to six months.

Sometimes confusing and often contradicting each other, accounts like these are common in the ongoing national discussion about welfare.

The People on Welfare

In a *New York Times* article, Jason DeParle writes: "To chart the nation's nascent welfare policy is to glimpse the American soul, its caring and its callousness, its fairness and its biases, its competence and its neglect."

Welfare took root in the inner cities and in rural areas, where jobs were hard to come by. Families needed aid just to put food on the table, and the horrors of the Great Depression of the 1930s were still relatively fresh. America's prosperity after World War II didn't do away with everyone's needs.

> **"To chart the nation's nascent welfare policy is to glimpse the American soul, its caring and its callousness, its fairness and its biases, its competence and its neglect."**
> **— Jason DeParle, *New York Times***

Even the very strong U.S. economy of the 1990s hasn't benefited everyone. The Census Bureau estimates that in 1996 about 13.7 percent of the U.S. population, or about 36 million people, lived on incomes below the poverty line. Among that population are some of our most vulnerable citizens. More than 9 million children benefited from Aid to Families with Dependent Children, one of the principal programs under the umbrella of "welfare," according to author Felice Davidson Perlmutter.

The well-being of children was one of the most persuasive reasons for creating welfare in the first place, but no one foresaw the program's unintended consequences. Start handing money to anyone, and the chances are their will to work will diminish. Parents who received aid soon involved their whole families in learning how to make ends meet on welfare. Welfare payments sometimes discouraged marriage or encouraged deception, because the acknowledged presence of an able-bodied

spouse could reduce benefits. Some welfare recipients who were able to work stuck to unskilled, short-term jobs that paid cash, which they would not report as income so they could continue collecting full welfare benefits.

But the typical welfare recipient is "a woman in her twenties or thirties with young children and a history of domestic violence, insufficient education, and low expectations for achievement," according to the Institute for Public Affairs.

Carol Moor, of suburban Los Angeles, is in her early thirties, has three small children and has no husband.

"I really would prefer to have a job than to be on welfare," Moor told the *Daily News* of Los Angeles. "I really would like to be on my own."

Her government check and food stamps were barely enough to live on before welfare reform. Moor eagerly plunged into the job training and job fairs the state of California put together to make welfare reform work. But finding a job was slow, especially with three children, only a high school diploma, and damaged self-esteem.

Many of the factors that led people like Moor to join the welfare rolls haven't been removed. Teenagers still often drop out of high school, young women bear children they have trouble supporting, and not everyone can find good jobs. Those problems persist, and pose some of the greatest challenges to welfare reform.

Why Is This Issue Important to Us?

The poor aren't the only people affected by changes in welfare. Only a small portion of our taxes are used for assistance programs, but we nonetheless have strong feelings about how that money should be spent. We may have friends or family members who receive assistance or, at some point, may receive aid ourselves. We may contribute to canned food drives or donate money and clothing to charities for needy families during the holidays.

We may notice people ahead of us in line at the grocery store paying with food stamps, or we may encounter impoverished people on city streets. We know that failure to deal fully and fairly with poverty could be disastrous, putting people on the street and straining social bonds.

Sometimes, those encounters trouble us deeply as we are torn, once again, between compassion and our belief in the value of self-sufficiency.

The history of government benefits in America

1962:

Amendments to existing laws added funds for more social workers. From 1962 to 1966, one million additional welfare recipients were added to the rolls each year.

1964:

In his State of the Union address, President Lyndon Johnson announced the "War on Poverty." Over the next five years, this led to the creation of more than two dozen federal welfare programs and expanded eligibility for older programs like Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Spending on public assistance reached $34.9 billion.

1970s:

Many businesses and corporations began a continuing process of downsizing.

1973:

Welfare funding had reached $119.4 billion (in 1993 dollars), almost five times as much as in 1965 (when adjusted for inflation). Total welfare spending had grown to 3.8 percent of the economy, compared to 1.3 percent in 1965. Average welfare spending per person was $2,938 per person in 1993 dollars.

1980s:

The current policy to move people off welfare and into jobs gained political impetus.

1996:

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 was signed into law. This dramatically changed America's welfare system, shifting more responsibility onto the states, placing time limits on aid, and requiring able-bodied recipients to seek work.

1993:

Welfare spending had grown to $324 billion (in 1993 dollars), more than double the $158 billion spent in 1975. Average spending per person was $4,023 (in 1993 dollars) — three times higher than the peak during the Great Depression.

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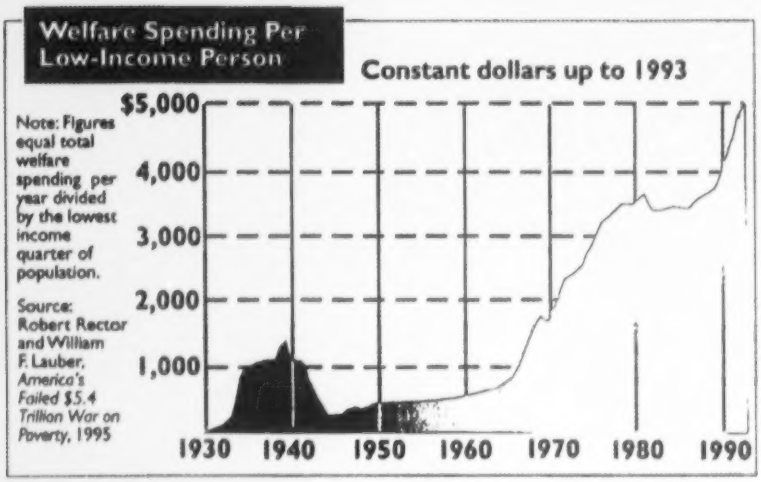


"I really would prefer to have a job than to be on welfare. I really would like to be on my own."
— Carol Moor, a single mother trying to make the transition from welfare to work.

The Choices

As we continue to change our welfare system, we face some tough decisions. This book presents three possible choices we can make in meeting that challenge:

- **Choice One** says that every American has a responsibility to be a productive member of society. In this view, the only way to end poverty is to make jobs the path to independence from government assistance. All but a very few people — even those of us who are disabled — can do something to contribute to society. Only if we all do our part will our country function as it should.
- **Choice Two** says that some people — the very old, the very young, the severely disabled, and their caregivers — simply cannot work, and there will always be people who run into hard times and need temporary help. If we cut off their assistance, they will suffer unbearable hardships, according to this view. These people need to have the basics provided so they can live in dignity.
- **Choice Three** says the problem is best solved before it begins. People can and will rise above even the worst of circumstances when they're given a solid foundation and opportunities to do so. This view maintains that education, training, and a healthy start in life are the most effective ways to eliminate the need for welfare and other aid programs, except in extreme cases.

For Further Reading / Introduction

- Michael Harrington, *The Other America* (New York: Collier Books, 1962).
- Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996).
- Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein, *Making Ends Meet: How Single Mothers Survive Welfare and Low Wage Work* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1997).
- Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).
- Marvin Olasky, *The Tragedy of American Compassion* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 1995).

Everyone Should Work

The Norfolk Virginian-Pilot

Michelle Wallner and her daughter, Devon, talk to a friend outside a window in the apartment they had just moved into. They got the apartment after Wallner moved off welfare to a job in a nursing home.

It's obvious that ending welfare and putting people to work is the right answer, supporters of Choice One say. Just look at the stories coming out across the country about people finding new independence and self-esteem through work.

In Culpeper, Virginia, Michelle Wallner rented an apartment for herself and her six-year-old daughter after going off of welfare. The single mother found a job as an aide in a nursing home and has already received two raises.

Wallner told the *Virginian-Pilot* newspaper she would have eventually left welfare on her own. But she freely admits, "They pushed it along. It happened quicker than I would have done it on my own."

Now Wallner says getting her own place was easily the best thing about her new life, and she vows she will get by on her own: "I'm just going to do it. I'm going to do it."

Wallner made hard choices. Her apartment is not all she would like it to be. But supporters of Choice One say that is the beauty of putting people to work. They find the inner strength that welfare saps.

Government should not support anyone who can work, and everyone should work as well as they can. This is a big country with a strong economy. While no society will ever reach true full employment, we have the capacity to put more Americans to work. It is not just good for the country, or sound economic policy. It's good for them, and truly compassionate.

If we put people to work, we aren't giving them a free ride. We are making an investment in encouraging work.

Supporters of Choice One feel every part of society must play a role:

- Local, state, and federal governments can provide tax breaks and incentives to encourage business. They, too, can provide jobs, instead of just handouts.
- Corporations, many of them enjoying record profits, can help with training programs and jobs.
- Foundations, churches, and other nonprofit organizations can help run training and literacy programs or help pay for them.

- Every American can volunteer to help train people to work, or teach them to read.

It's Good Business

Training programs are working all over the country. At Cessna Aircraft in Wichita, Kansas, the 21st Street Training Facility has put more than 300 people into jobs at Cessna. The facility not only provides job skills, but helps participants with basic living and social skills, child care, transportation, and other services they may need.

Two of its graduates, single mothers Joydee Bradley and Tonya Oden, met President Bill Clinton in 1997 when he came to Wichita to celebrate the success of Cessna's program.

Cessna executives understand that providing these services and putting people to work isn't charity, it's good business. It makes the country more productive.

According to The Associated Press, the number of firms offering welfare-to-work hiring programs quadrupled from 1997 to 1998.

In Wisconsin, where there actually has been a labor shortage, a government loan to a joint venture called YW Works — formed by the YWCA, the Kaiser Group, and CNR Health — helps train welfare recipients for jobs at local companies, including Victory Personnel Services. This is the kind of cooperation between government, private industry, and public service organizations that Choice One supporters feel is the right approach.

Elaine Maley, a YWCA spokesperson, told the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, "What they're learning there is the routine of work and the socialization of work. It's the routine of getting up every day and having a regular schedule."

While some will fail, some of the people trained by these programs will stay in the work force, which should be everyone's goal.

A survey by the Economic and Social Research Institute found that most employers cared more about finding workers who are reliable and have a good attitude, than workers who have specific skills.

Where jobs are more scarce in the private sector, the government must find creative ways to put people in simple jobs, such as cleaning parks or doing other chores, to keep them in the habit of working.

Some states have instituted "workfare," a requirement that people who can't find regular employment must work at public service jobs to earn

Wide World Photos

A graduate of a state "workfare program" receives her job training certificate in Chicago in 1987. She earned the certificate through Project Chance, one of the early efforts to move people off of welfare rolls.

their cash benefits. At the very least, while not exposing them to a truly competitive workplace, it will make them more accustomed to a job routine.

Eliminate Those Taking Advantage of the System

While most of those who receive welfare are not committing fraud, studies show that some people will take advantage of a system that hands out money. This is a symptom of the casual attitude that both the government and many citizens now take toward taxpayers' money.

Federal auditors who looked at welfare reform in Wisconsin found that nearly 25 percent of welfare recipients who failed to show up for new work assignments did so because they already had other income that had never been reported to their caseworkers. A University of Wisconsin study found that 20 percent of all welfare recipients in that state had unreported jobs.

By requiring people to work, we can remind everyone of their responsibility to support themselves, and not make it easy for them to steal from the taxpayer.

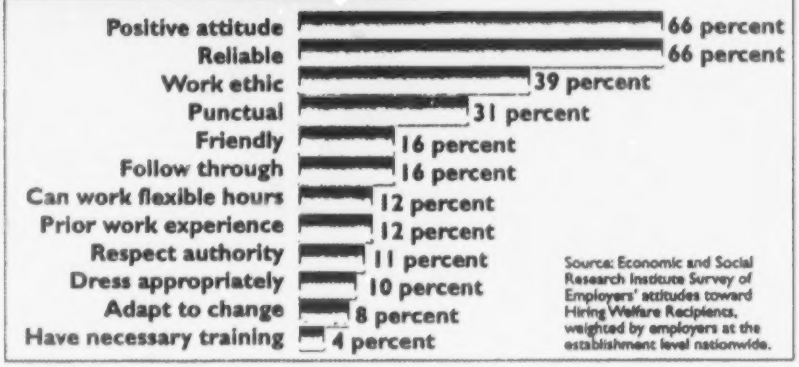
They may wind up gaining financially, too: in a Washington State survey of former welfare recipients, 60 percent said their families were better off since they found employment, and another 22 percent said they were no worse off.

Wisconsin, which began its welfare reform efforts before the new federal law was passed in 1996, is an example of what's possible. Its program uses multiple job-search and job training efforts to move welfare recipients or applicants into work with nonprofit and for-profit employers. If someone misses time at work or in job training, their benefits are reduced accordingly at a per-hour rate, called "pay for performance." This helps teach responsibility even during the transition from welfare to work.

Restore the Work Ethic

America since World War II has been overtaken by a sense of entitlement, argues Robert J. Samuelson in *The Good Life and Its Discontents*. Our successes at midcentury, combined with new social policies, cut into our sense of self-motivation and discipline, while making it seem we could afford many things we could not.

Job candidate qualities rated as most important by employers


Positive attitude 66 percent
Reliable 66 percent
Work ethic 39 percent
Punctual 31 percent
Friendly 16 percent
Follow through 16 percent
Can work flexible hours 12 percent
Prior work experience 12 percent
Respect authority 11 percent
Dress appropriately 10 percent
Adapt to change 8 percent
Have necessary training 4 percent

Source: Economic and Social Research Institute Survey of Employers' attitudes toward Hiring Welfare Recipients, weighted by employers at the establishment level nationwide.

Supporters of Choice One see welfare and its attack on self-reliance as part of this process, robbing its recipients and our nation of energy, creativity, and ambition.

"In general, our forebears understood that life was full of chance and uncertainty," Samuelson writes. "They recognized that getting ahead and leading a fulfilling life involved periodic setbacks and inevitable risks.... Some people were lucky, some weren't."

That is the national sense we need to recapture. One reason welfare is ending is that we should no longer support people who were making bad choices, by having children they couldn't support or by taking drugs.

Although many jobs don't pay well, that always has been the case. Some people may have to work more than one job, and low pay is an incentive to get better jobs. In fact, a study of 12 states by the Urban Institute found that even minimum-wage, full-time jobs would put a single parent and two children above the poverty line.

Entering the new century, we must restore that sense of personal responsibility, not merely out of virtue but because it is the most likely way to live a successful and rewarding life.

"Giving people money without working, cripples them. I firmly believe that," Kitty Lynch, who trains welfare recipients for new jobs in California, told *Governing* magazine. "You lose your edge. You lose your confidence that you can do it yourself. I see it in my participants' eyes: 'It's not that I'm lazy, it's that I'm scared.'"

"Giving people money without working cripples them. I firmly believe that. You lose your edge. You lose your confidence that you can do it yourself." — Kitty Lynch, who trains welfare recipients for new jobs in California.

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"I'm just going to do it. I'm going to do it." — Michelle Wallner, who is moving from welfare to work.

What Opponents Say

Opponents of Choice One see the situation differently:

It's Too Optimistic

It's not so easy to come up with enough jobs for everyone on welfare. A study by the National Conference of State Legislatures of nine states' welfare reform efforts found that only about half of all former welfare recipients found jobs. Most welfare recipients live in urban or rural areas, yet the bulk of new jobs being created are located in the suburbs.

For every anecdote about a welfare recipient who has successfully moved into the work force, there are others who failed. In the same town in Virginia where Michelle Wallner lives, there is also Deborah Taliaferro, a 41-year-old single mother who could not get a job, finally lost her benefits, and whose electricity had been cut off.

U.S. News & World Report noted that most states had opted out of workfare, primarily because the expense and logistics of providing public sector jobs to welfare recipients were too great.

In addition, all those training programs cost money, possibly more money than simply providing benefits to the truly needy.

Some people will never be able to fully support themselves and their families, and we can't pretend otherwise.

It Ignores the Reality of the Marketplace

Choice One makes it sound like good times are here again, and no one has any problems. But that's not how things are.

Studies show that a widening income gap is leaving many people out of the nation's good times. You can't support a family on minimum wage.

The *Sacramento Bee* reported in 1997 that the income gap between the richest and the poorest families has widened in California and throughout most of the nation during the last two decades. In all but two states, the richest one-fifth of families increased their average income more than the poorest one-fifth.

Many companies have "downsized" their work forces, putting more competition for jobs into the labor market.

Single Mothers

The increased number of single mothers became a fact of life in the 1990s.

For single mothers, who are on welfare, the situation is very precarious. A sick child or a problem with transportation can easily get them fired from an entry-level job. If a child has a serious disability, the mother may not be able to keep a job.

Besides, who says working is more valuable than staying home and taking care of children?

In Support

✓ Every individual should work to the best of their capacity. The dignity of work is more valuable than a handout. True compassion leads to helping people help themselves, not to fostering dependency.

✓ Government should not support able-bodied people. That is not its role and it is potentially disastrous to the nation.

✓ If people aren't put to work, welfare will continue to sap resources — human and economic. If everyone does their part, America will be stronger, more productive, and more competitive in the global marketplace.

✓ Welfare recipients should take whatever jobs they can find. Any entry-level job is an opportunity for an individual to learn and move up to a better job.

✓ It is not an excuse to say, "I can't live on what they pay me." Many Americans are proud to work at more than one job.

In Opposition

✗ There are not enough jobs, especially in the right regions, to employ all those who are currently on welfare, even with a robust economy.

✗ Providing all the necessary jobs, including government "workfare," would cost more in the long run than paying cash benefits.

✗ The working poor are the evidence that work alone is not the solution. The minimum wage is not a living wage. What do we do about those who work and still can't provide for basic needs?

✗ Insisting everyone work isn't realistic. Some people are too young, too disabled, or too mentally ill.

✗ Who is to say that working outside the home is more valuable than staying home to care for small children? If we insist that all able-bodied welfare recipients work outside the home, will their children — and society — pay a price?

For Further Reading / Everyone Should Work

- Robert J. Samuelson, *The Good Life and Its Discontents* (New York: Random House, 1995).
- Felice Davidson Perlmutter, *From Welfare to Work: Corporate Initiatives and Welfare Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
- Susan E. Mayer, *What Money Can't Buy: Family Income and Children's Life Chances* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1997).

Help Those Who Can't Work

Danny Rotkin/The Dayton Voice

Stephanie Taylor is struggling to get a nursing degree while living on welfare and caring for her three children, one of whom has cerebral palsy.

In Dayton, Ohio, single mother Stephanie Taylor has three children, including a son with cerebral palsy. She told *The Dayton Voice* she is trying to get a nursing degree so she can get a better job, but her struggle to do so is considerably complicated by her son's health and by the requirements of welfare reform.

One month she missed an appointment with her welfare caseworker because she was trying to get her children off to school. As a result, she lost most of their welfare assistance for that month. One of Taylor's sons then came down with a severe case of flu, further setting her back. Between the medical expenses and lost benefits, Taylor was forced to borrow money for food.

"Last winter I did lots of crying," Taylor said. "People thought I was going to have a nervous breakdown."

Supporters of Choice Two argue there are people with urgent needs in America now, and simply telling them to get a job isn't helpful. We don't necessarily have to return to the old welfare system, but we must be able to take care of those who can't or shouldn't work.

As a society, we decided decades ago that children shouldn't work. And there are people who are unemployable for other reasons, because they have either a physical or mental disability, or they simply have trouble dealing with the realities of a job.

Supporters of Choice Two say there are some people who simply cannot work and care for themselves. They must have their basic needs met so they can live in dignity. We must find a way to provide the essentials for the truly needy, small children and people who are incapable of making their own way because of physical or mental impairment.

We know that in the past, some — although a minority — took advantage of the old system, and we must act with discretion in the future to avoid a repetition of that problem.

Government, after all, is an expression of what we want. We can't ask the government to abandon people and pretend it's not our responsibility. Helping the needy may not be solely the government's job. But government should have a role, as should businesses, charities, and even families.

Budget cuts over the past 15 years already have increased the number of people needing food and shelter. Although Americans may not starve to death from lack of food for a day or two, they can become ill. Children can become malnourished, their minds and bodies stunted.

And some people cannot find jobs because jobs do not exist. A U.S. Conference of Mayors survey in November 1997 found that 13 of the largest cities have concerns about having enough low-skill jobs available. Detroit expected a shortfall of 75,303 jobs; Philadelphia, 53,400 jobs; and Seattle, 28,533 jobs. Boston, St. Paul, St. Louis, and New Orleans also worried about shortfalls.

If people cannot work or find jobs for whatever reason, we must ensure that the basic needs of individuals and families are met. This is not a nation without resources. We can and should help the needy. Indeed, it is a responsibility to do so. Our Judeo-Christian heritage teaches us that.

Wide World Photos

Volunteers for New York City's City Harvest, above, are loading leftover food from a restaurant that will go to area soup kitchens to feed the homeless. Many such programs exist throughout the United States.

Help Those Who Can't Help Themselves

Nearly 26 million people, or about 10 percent of the U.S. population, used food banks that are part of the Second Harvest network in 1997, a study by the Chicago-based group found. About 38 percent of those people were children, the study found, and 21 percent of the households included a disabled person. Two-thirds of the families served were earning $10,000 a year or less.

Millions of people live in similar circumstances across the nation — the disabled, the mentally ill, and children. The Census Bureau estimated that in 1996, one out of five U.S. children under 18 lived in poverty.

The Kaiser Foundation, in a study quoted in *Atlantic Monthly*, found that 30 percent of the welfare caseload consisted of women caring for disabled children or who are disabled themselves. The Urban Institute estimated that 100,000 to 200,000 disabled children would lose Social Security benefits.

When SSI and Medicaid benefits were cut in Georgia, 8-year-old Christopher Russell was one of 3,000 children in that state who lost health benefits, according to The Associated Press. Christopher has cerebral palsy. He needs regular medical care, which his family cannot afford.

If necessary, resources should be redirected from programs for the able-bodied, or less vital subsidies, to care for citizens in that situation.

"Last winter I did lots of crying. People thought I was going to have a nervous breakdown."

— Stephanie Taylor, a single mother trying to juggle welfare requirements, her education and her son's illness.

Every Individual Can Help

Just as government still should have a role in meeting basic needs, so should individuals, who can contribute their skills and spare time to others who are less fortunate than they are.

Too many Americans are not as involved in their communities as they could be, and this is a golden opportunity. Many of those on welfare need literacy tutoring, and frequently they need help with simple problems.

Ed Kirk, a retired businessman in Maryland, set about helping one single mother get off of welfare and into steady employment, according to *Christianity Today*. His church paired the two people — one with needs, the other with free time and skills.

Because the mother had no car, Kirk drove her to her new job every day and dropped her child off with a babysitter. During the day, he tackled several of her problems, such as a revoked driver's license, that would otherwise have prevented her from staying employed in the long run.

"To get people back on their feet is not just about getting a job," Kirk said. "It's about getting all their problems solved."

Similar personal mentoring programs are under way in Mississippi, Michigan, and Virginia. They are vitally necessary, and many more are needed. Although many people like Ed Kirk already volunteer, many more could do so.

Americans cannot afford to assume it is someone else's problem.

"To get people back on their feet is not just about getting a job. It's about getting all their problems solved."
— Ed Kirk, retired businessman helping a single mother get off welfare.

What Materials Are Needed to Support This Response?

A broad spectrum of Americans have come to believe that the real hope of reform and the true answers to long-vexing social problems will come from the efforts of people outside of government.

This agreement is rooted in common appreciation that communities and civic groups and churches have strengths and abilities beyond the dreams of government. They are actively and intimately involved in needy individuals' lives. They share a common code of moral responsibility that provides guidance and guardrails. They have elements of faith that touch people in a far more profound way than a check or a voucher.

This emphasizes the ability of religious communities, civic organizations, and individual volunteers to meet the needs of their

Wide World Photos

Shoe repair shop owner Pericles Koskor in 1932 epitomized the helping spirit that many believe will help end dependence on public assistance. A Greek immigrant, he gave breakfast tickets to unemployed men as a way of repaying the debt he felt he owed America for the prosperity he was experiencing 12 years after coming to the U.S.

less-fortunate neighbors. The mentally ill, for instance, need medical attention if they can ever rejoin the workaday world. The homeless — some of whom work but do not make enough to pay rent — have myriad needs. The hungry must be fed.

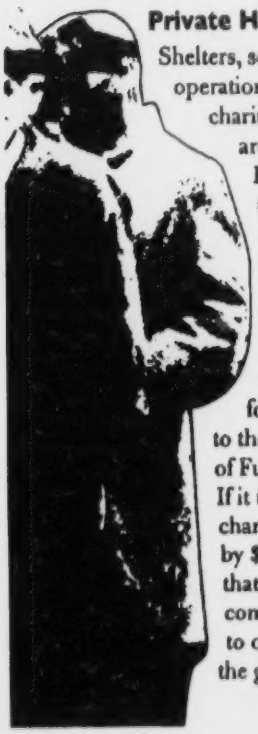
In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a former welfare mother named Deborah Darden has launched the Right Alternatives Family Service Center, a community-based day care and adult education center in a public housing project. Together with neighbors, she drew up a list of 13 values that every community needs, and began the "Count Me In" campaign, which gives residents a window decal indicating they will be responsible for their children.

She started the program, she told the *City Journal*, because, "People told us they were afraid to talk, and kids were acting up because they knew no one would say anything."

Alongside government and charitable groups, community-based efforts like Darden's have a vital role in a strategy that encourages the very poor to work, but recognizes that there are those people, who for whatever reasons, are unable to care for themselves and their families beyond simple day-to-day survival.

What Opponents Say

Opponents of Choice Two often say:



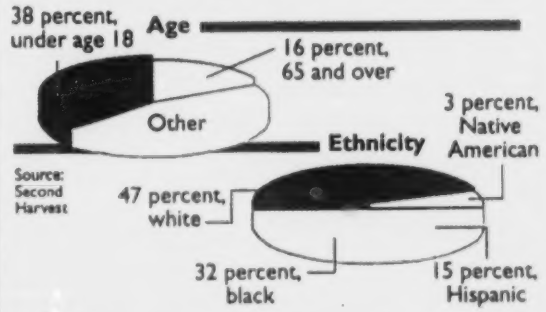
Private Help Has Limits

Shelters, soup kitchens, and similar operations run by churches and charitable organizations already are stretched to the limit. Especially in the big cities, they are struggling to keep up with the needs created by years of budget cuts.

Between 1963 and 1993, charitable giving rose from $70 billion to $126 billion, adjusted for inflation, according to the American Association of Fund-Raising Counsel. If it took 30 years for private charity donations to increase by $56 billion, how likely is it that private donors can swiftly come up with enough money to offset the billions in cuts by the government?

A profile of who is hungry

People served by the Second Harvest network



Also, many private charities are run in part with public money. *U.S. News & World Report* noted that charities get about 30 percent of their funding from the government, and some receive much more than that. One organization that serves metropolitan Chicago one year received $23 million from the government, nearly half of its budget.

Besides, there is no coordination of private assistance, one of the problems that led to the creation of government programs. People, especially children, can easily fall into the cracks between various services.

Charity Is Not the Answer

Asking private nonprofit organizations to pick up the slack is simply trading one dependency for another. If the needy rely on charity of any kind, from the government or anyone else, it still destroys the work ethic and diminishes their sense of self-sufficiency.

The only help that charities should offer is real jobs, not just make-work, and the job training and other skills that people need in order to work in the private sector.

Choice Two — Help Those Who Can't Work

In Support

- There are many valid reasons why people cannot support themselves. To address their needs we do not need to return to welfare as it was, but we must find a way to take care of those who can't work.
- Children, the disabled, and the mentally ill should not have to work.
- In America, we should live up to our religious and ethical principles. We should not tolerate hunger or homelessness or any of the other poverty-driven tragedies that people face.
- Most of us have what we need; those who do should help those who don't.
- More Americans could volunteer, helping others by teaching them to read or by doing small tasks or helping them solve problems that interfere with their ability to work.

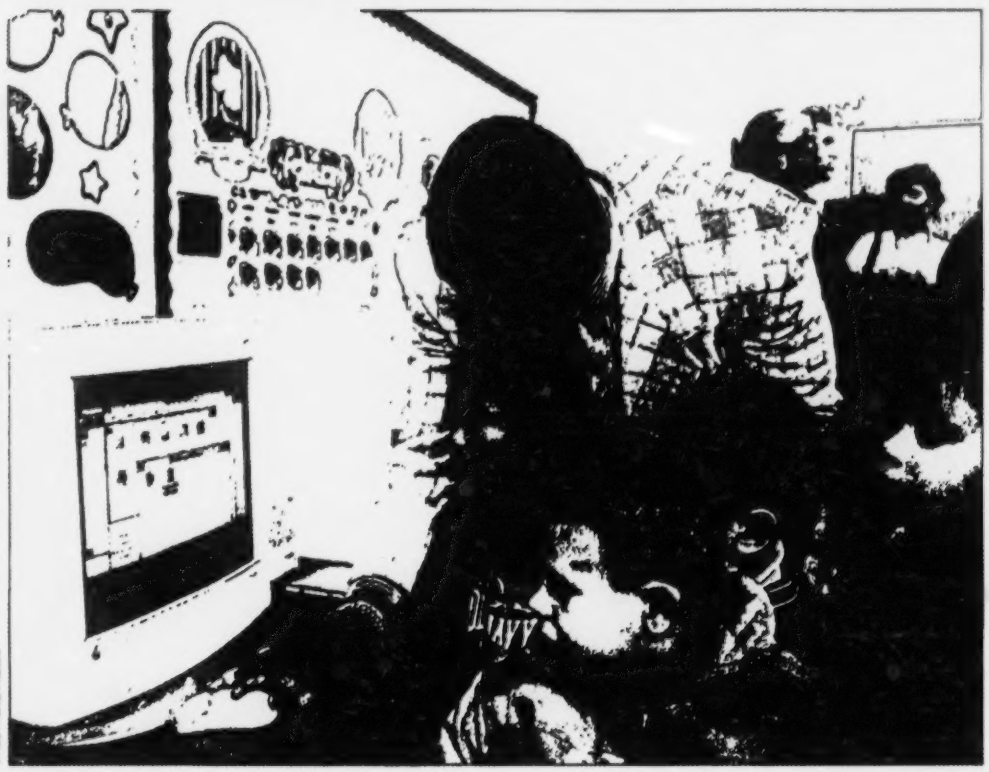
In Opposition

- Most private, nonprofit organizations, such as homeless shelters and soup kitchens, already are stretched to the limit, and many rely on government funding even now.
- There is nothing in place to coordinate nongovernment assistance. Someone must decide who the truly needy are and make sure they don't fall into the cracks between agencies.
- Providing aid in any form is paternalistic. It ignores family responsibility and fails to address the problem of dependency.
- If nonprofit organizations take over the job of helping the unfortunate, it's just welfare in disguise.
- Work is the only thing that truly gives people dignity.

For Further Reading / Help Those Who Can't Work

- Mark R. Rand, *Living on the Edge: The Realities of Welfare Reform in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).
- Michael L. Murray, *...And Justice for All* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1997).
- Greg J. Duncan and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, *The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1997).
- William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, & Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

Prepare Productive Citizens



Wide World Photos

Dallas Cowboys superstar and Head Start alumnus Deion Sanders helps children use a computer during a visit to the Chapel of Peace Head Start Center in Inglewood, California. Such programs are an important part of long-term efforts to end the cycle of poverty that perpetuates welfare.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, infant mortality rates in the U.S. dropped by a third, and even more in low-income neighborhoods. Life expectancy rose significantly. Gross malnutrition among children diminished. The proportion of Americans living in poverty declined.

All of this, according to Michael B. Katz and other authorities, was the result of the War on Poverty, part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's "Great Society" program. It was the last time the United States mounted an effort to fundamentally reshape the society and eradicate the unacceptable conditions in which many people lived.

Despite the gains cited, defense spending on the Vietnam War crippled the "Great Society" effort, taking funding away from many programs, particularly those that emphasized education.

Supporters of Choice Three believe it is necessary, if not to revive the War on Poverty, then to embark on a new effort to invest in prevention of poverty, and thus minimize the need for welfare. Only through renewed

What the U.S. spends on education per student

What is spent on public education in various countries, in proportion to their Gross Domestic Product (GPD). Ratios are ranked from highest to lowest.

	GDP ratio	Per student
Sweden	.31	$5,336
Norway	.30	5,262
Finland	.29	4,237
Canada	.25	4,935
Denmark	.25	4,475
Austria	.23	4,107
Italy	.23	4,036
Switzerland	.22	4,838
United States	.21	4,935
U.K.	.21	3,365
France	.20	3,360
Belgium	.19	3,438
Netherlands	.19	3,192
Germany	.18	3,616
Australia	.15	2,532
Japan	.14	2,707

Source: American Federation of Teachers

emphasis on education, families, and carefully selected programs for young people can we break the cycle that traps millions of Americans and instead prepare them to be productive citizens.

We should make sure that all children graduate from high school with at least basic skills. For those who do not choose to attend college, job training programs should be widely available. And adults who lose their jobs should go back into such training.

At the same time, there should be a new emphasis on helping families, generally agreed to be the fundamental unit of our society. They should not lack health care, child care, or transportation. Parenting classes also should be emphasized.

It will cost money. But this is a wealthy country, we have the money, and this is the right way to spend it. If we do not begin long-term efforts to remedy the situation, we probably will have this same discussion in ten years, or twenty.

Peter Edelman, a former assistant secretary at the Department of Health and Human Services, wrote in the *Atlantic Monthly*, "In the toughest neighborhoods, with all the dangers and pitfalls of street life, there are young people who beat the odds.... But there are many more who could make it with a little extra support and attention. It is enormously important that we increase the number of young people who make it. We give a lot of lip service to prevention, whether of crime or drug abuse or teen pregnancy. But we will never prevent these negative outcomes as well as we could until we pursue a general strategy of creating opportunity and clear pathways to opportunity — a positive youth-development strategy."

The Importance of Education

A report by the American Federation of Teachers, comparing education spending in the U.S. against other industrialized nations, found that America's investment in education is at best average. When that spending is adjusted for national income, it slips to below average.

Supporters of Choice Three feel this cannot go on. Too often, education budgets have fallen under the budget axe first, or worse, been forced to rely on the income from state lotteries. Education is too important to the nation's future for that, say proponents of this choice.

A sustained investment in our educational system will reap more long-term benefits than any other strategy we could pursue. In the 1950s, the nation launched a new emphasis on education because of the perceived Russian advantage in science. The same kind of effort is needed today.

In eastern Kentucky, Megan Hoffman, 17, graduated from Owsley County High School and plans to attend college. Her father, Neil, told the *New York Times*, "It took us three generations to get into this mess, and it's going to take us three generations to get out of it."

His daughter appears to be on her way. But she is the exception in this corner of Appalachia, and the attitude of most of her classmates is apparent in the message the class voted to put on its T-shirts: "I came. I slept. I graduated."

Kids often joke about high school. Americans can't afford the same view of their responsibilities toward schools.

In their book, *Getting Ahead: Economic and Social Mobility in America*, Isabel V. Sawhill and Daniel P. McMurrer argue that education is critical to success, but variations in quality and funding of local school districts often put some children at a disadvantage in the competition for good jobs when they reach adulthood.

"It took us three generations to get into this mess, and it's going to take us three generations to get out of it."
— Neil Hoffman, one of the working poor in Owsley County, Kentucky.

Investing in Families

Supporters of Choice Three believe that, when given the right environment and skills, children can and do rise above their circumstances. Giving everyone from birth a real chance is the only way to break the cycle of children destined to raise more children who need society's aid.

We got into the welfare mess in the first place by treating symptoms rather than underlying problems. We must address the causes that push people into

welfare, preferably within each family. Prevention, in the long run, is cheaper and more humane than expensive bandages.

In Savannah, Georgia, a long-empty Catholic high school now bustles with life, offering the neighborhood services such as health and mental health clinics, child care, after-school and summer camp programs, and assistance with finances, employment, and housing.

The center, cited by the National Civic League as one of the "Communities That Strengthen Families," aims to give low-income families the tools they need to make their own way and give their children a better chance of supporting their own children in the future.

Molding a child into a productive adult is difficult work even in the most affluent families. It becomes almost impossible when parents lack the financial, educational, and moral foundation on which to build their children's future.

It is not that difficult to discern which approaches work best. Over time, we have seen the successes and we know how to test for the failures.

> **"It is enormously important that we increase the number of young people who make it. We give a lot of lip service to prevention, whether of crime or drug abuse or teen pregnancy. But we will never prevent these negative outcomes as well as we could until we pursue a general strategy of creating opportunity and clear pathways to opportunity — a positive youth-development strategy."**
>
> **— Peter Edelman, a former assistant secretary at the Department of Health and Human Services**

Weed and Seed

Many good intervention programs exist, especially for children. These include such programs as Healthy Start, Head Start, Boys and Girls Clubs, the YWCA, and the YMCA. These need to be encouraged with both public and private help.

The state of Minnesota is paying new attention to this issue.

"Welfare reform has brought additional focus to the fact that people on welfare have little children and they need child care in order to work," said Roger Moe, the Senate majority leader in Minnesota's legislature. "There's a growing realization that the tragic state of violent youth crime is the result of neglect of children 15 to 20 years ago. You have to focus on children at a very early age. We are making progress on these issues, but we're not there yet."

Minnesota is putting additional funding into Head

Peter Edelman, a former U.S. assistant secretary of Health and Human Services and Georgetown University law professor, believes strongly in the need to reach children early with programs that will later help them overcome their economically and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds.

White World Photos

Start, the Early Childhood Family Education program, after-school programs, and others meant to prepare children and their families for school.

Teen pregnancy, one element of poverty in many families, is a national problem that needs to be addressed, according to proponents of this choice. While it's not as severe as it once was, no one believes it has gone away, and teen pregnancy triggers a chain of social costs.

"There's a growing realization that the tragic state of violent youth crime is the result of neglect of children 15 to 20 years ago. You have to focus on children at a very early age. We are making progress on these issues, but we're not there yet." — Roger Moe, the Senate majority leader in Minnesota's legislature

Whether the incidence of teen pregnancy is reduced through abstinence or birth control should be up to each family with a daughter, but increased education about sexuality and pregnancy is one way to prevent out-of-wedlock births. Even more important, perhaps, is enhancing teenagers' overall educational opportunities so that they set life goals, which preclude an unplanned pregnancy.

This nation must invest in families. Joblessness, teen pregnancy, domestic abuse, high school dropouts — all these problems are interconnected, and all tend to undermine families and drive people onto welfare. Supporters of Choice Three see its goal as an all-encompassing preventive effort, and as it makes headway on any of these issues, the others will follow.

That means ensuring that all children get the kind of nurturing they need to grow up to be productive citizens, and to have their own children when they're ready. It means investing in education. It means providing an adequate support system for parents. It means insisting that intervention programs that include mentoring, tutoring, and meeting basic needs are provided for children until their parents can provide them.

What Opponents Say

Opponents of Choice Three tend to say:

It Ignores Immediate Needs

In Baltimore alone, officials fear that hundreds of people, including children, could become homeless because of cuts in welfare. Millions of men, women, and children are at risk of ending up on the streets because of welfare reform and previous budget cuts.

The tools and the money are there now if we only use them properly, and if everyone takes a hand. Carefully building a new program that will take 20 years to implement is simply averting our eyes from the pressing needs today. People need help now, not just investment in the future.

It's Too Ambitious

Don't tell me about the Great Society. We will never be able to prevent some people living in poverty. People must take responsibility for their own choices, and some will make bad choices. Billions of dollars invested in any program won't change that.

This choice would call for a massive, government-led restructuring of America's priorities, and that isn't likely to happen in an era of pared-down government.

This Isn't a Job for Government

You can't build strong families with programs, and it isn't society's or government's job to make them stronger.

The government is getting out of the welfare business because it failed, and that kind of social tinkering by government will always fail. Families have to make it on their own, learning from their mistakes, or their parents' mistakes, and many do. It's demeaning to act as if someone has to do it for them.

In Support

- Welfare will one day be unnecessary if we invest more resources in preventing poverty.
- We need to concentrate on programs that develop children's minds and bodies, teach moral and ethical behavior early in life, and center those lessons in strong family values.
- Children deserve the opportunity to grow up with self-esteem and good educations. They should not be penalized if their parents are unable to provide these things.
- It is far more cost effective to invest in programs such as those that discourage unwed pregnancy, illiteracy, drug and alcohol abuse, deadbeat parents, and crime than to pay for the consequences of those acts.
- All of us benefit if we help families by providing the resources they need to raise their children to be sucessful.

In Opposition

- Preventing poverty before it begins is simply a too "pie-in-the-sky" theory.
- Poor people have always been among us and always will be.
- Strong families are the answer, but they do not need outside interference to care for themselves. It is their individual responsibility, not that of society.
- Adult misfortune is not a given just because a child is poor. Many successful people rose from humble beginnings.
- If we put all our money into long-term programs, what happens to the people who need help now? We cannot abandon them.

For Further Reading / Prepare Productive Citizens

- Lisbeth B. Schorr, *Common Purpose: Strengthening Families and Neighborhoods to Rebuild America* (New York: Doubleday, 1997).
- William Julius Wilson, *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (New York: Knopf, 1996).

From Welfare to Work

Overview

New legislation has given states the responsibility for moving people off welfare rolls and into jobs. How realistic is that? And how well does it address the needs of children, the elderly, the disabled, the mentally ill, and other economically vulnerable members of society?

How can our country best avoid long-term dependence on handouts, while providing a hand up to the truly unfortunate? For generations, we have struggled with this question. Our discussion centers on the following questions: Who should help the poor and vulnerable? Our government? Individuals? Churches and charities? Families? How much should we help the poor and how?

Choice 1: Everyone Should Work

Every American has a responsibility to contribute to society. We must require everyone to work, because that's the only effective way to fight poverty. Even those with limited skills or disabilities can do something.

What Can Be Done?

- Require needy people to receive training and/or find work within a specified time.
- Use incentives such as tax breaks to encourage businesses to provide training, and create public sector jobs.
- Stop rewarding irresponsible behavior by giving handouts to people who make poor choices.

In Support

- Every individual should work to the best of their capacity. The dignity of work is more valuable than a handout.
- Government should not support able-bodied people. That is not its role and it is potentially disastrous to the nation.
- If people aren't put to work, welfare will continue to sap our resources. Each of us should do our part.
- Welfare recipients should take whatever jobs they can find.
- It is not an excuse to say, "I can't live on what they pay me." Many Americans are proud to work at more than one job.

In Opposition

- There are not enough jobs, especially in the right regions, to employ all those who are currently on welfare.
- Providing all the necessary jobs, including government "workfare," costs more in the long run than cash benefits.
- The working poor are the evidence that work alone is not the solution. The minimum wage is not a living wage.
- Insisting everyone work isn't realistic. Some people are too young, too disabled, or too mentally ill.
- Who is to say that working outside the home is more valuable than staying home to care for small children?

A Likely Trade-off?

In calling for jobs and training for all, this choice would place a huge burden on employers and would require parents to let others raise their children.

Choice 2: Help Those Who Can't Work

Some people simply cannot work while caring for themselves and their families. They must have help so they can live in dignity and have their basic needs met. We must help those truly unable to provide for themselves.

What Can Be Done?

- Encourage individuals, charities, nonprofit organizations, and churches to help the vulnerable.
- If necessary, redirect funds away from programs for the able-bodied to help those who cannot work.
- Create more cost-effective ways to provide for those who cannot care for themselves.

In Support

- There are many valid reasons why people cannot support themselves. We must take care of these people.
- Children, the disabled, and the mentally ill should not have to work.
- Our religious and ethical principles say we should not tolerate hunger, homelessness, or other poverty-driven tragedies.
- Most of us have what we need; those who do should help those who don't.
- More Americans could volunteer, helping others to overcome problems that interfere with their ability to work.

In Opposition

- Organizations such as homeless shelters and soup kitchens already are stretched to the limit.
- There is nothing in place to coordinate nongovernment assistance so that the right people get the right kind of help.
- Providing aid in any form is paternalistic. It ignores family responsibility and fosters dependency.
- If nonprofit organizations take over the job of helping the unfortunate, it's just welfare in disguise.
- Work is the only thing that truly gives people dignity.

A Likely Trade-off?

This choice would guarantee that we all will continue to pay, one way or another, to help people who may not deserve it.

Choice 3: Prepare Productive Citizens

Welfare became a problem in the first place because we were treating symptoms rather than underlying problems. We must address the causes of poverty within each family. In the long run, prevention is the answer.

What Can Be Done?

- Invest in education. Ensure that all children graduate from high school, then go to college or receive job training.
- Make sure families have transportation, child care, health care, and parenting education.
- Increase support for programs that get children off to a good start and that encourage a responsible family life-style.

In Support

- Welfare will one day be unnecessary if we invest more resources in preventing poverty.
- We need to develop children's minds and bodies, and teach morals, ethical behavior, and family values.
- Children deserve to grow up with self-esteem and good educations.
- It's more cost effective to invest in programs that teach responsible behavior than to pay for the consequences if we don't.
- All of us gain if we give families the help they need to raise their children to be successful.

In Opposition

- Preventing poverty before it begins is simply a too "pie-in-the-sky" theory.
- Poor people have always been among us and always will be.
- Strong families are the answer, but they do not need outside interference to care for themselves.
- Adult misfortune is not a given just because a child is poor. Many successful people rose from humble beginnings.
- If we put all our money into long-term programs, what happens to the people who need help now?

A Likely Trade-off?

By calling for more money for prevention programs, this choice would force higher taxes and/or reductions in other programs.

From Welfare to Work

Who Should We Help and How?

Catholic activist Dorothy Day published a "Letter to the Unemployed" in 1937, a letter that has been reprinted in *Letters of a Nation*.

Day said, "I remember how hard it was last Christmas to face you men. How could one say 'Merry Christmas' to you who are gaunt and cold and ragged?... But without faith in each other, we cannot go on. Without hope we cannot go on."

That was during the Great Depression, a disaster that prompted the creation of many of the programs that ultimately came to be known as "welfare." Thanks to the impact of those programs and the work of people like Day, poverty in the United States is neither as widespread nor as severe as it once was. We must remember how much we have been able to alleviate suffering, and be grateful for it.

But the need for welfare is still with us, despite all of our efforts and the economic good times, and the problem still demands our attention. Many hard-working people in this country are still one paycheck, or one serious illness, away from financial disaster.

This is a dilemma that forces us to examine how we, as a nation, look at opportunity, fairness, success, and generosity. In short, we must examine how we treat our fellow human beings.

As we move into a new, postwelfare era, we are shaping our policy toward the unemployed and the unemployable every day. There is a new law in place that puts more emphasis on work and responsibility, but many decisions still must be made, and some of them are personal.

What is the new role of government? Does it have a continued responsibility to shelter the needy, or must the rest of society take up that charge? What can each of us do — those who have been on welfare and those who have not?

We also should examine the role of politics and of conscience, making sure we don't lose sight of the human consequences as we debate legislation and programs.

"Poverty is not 'in the nature of things,'" Nobel laureate Nadine Gordimer wrote in the *New York Times*. "Poverty is not inevitable in the world today. There are the resources — food, shelter, work, skills, training — and means to make them available to all."

As we discuss the responsibilities of all Americans making the new welfare policy work for the benefit of everyone, we must remember that our experiences are authentic and should be included in the discussion.

We must be willing to share our views. We also must be open to hearing others express their ideas. Together we can determine the best way, in each of our communities, to put more people to work without causing more hardship on the neediest among us.

From Welfare to Work

Who Should We Help and How?

People get involved in National Issues Forums partly because they want elected and appointed officials to know how they feel about the issues. Each year, NIF reports what you say to local and national leaders. Please answer the questions below BEFORE you read this book. Before answering the questions, please make up a three-digit number and fill it in here: [ ].

1. Here is a list of principles on which proposals for reforming welfare might be based. How important do you think each one should be in making public policy on welfare?	Very important	Somewhat important	Not at all important	Not sure
a. Government should provide for the basic needs of those who are unable to work.	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. People who cannot find work should be required to work at public service jobs to earn cash benefits.	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. We should improve and equalize educational opportunities for all Americans.	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. Americans who have what they need should help those who do not.	☐	☐	☐	☐
e. More public money should be spent on preventing poverty in the first place.	☐	☐	☐	☐
f. Government should not support anyone who can work.	☐	☐	☐	☐

2. Look at the list in Question #1 again. How strongly is each principle actually reflected in our current policies?	Strongly	Somewhat strongly	Not at all	Not sure
a. Government should provide for the basic needs of those who are unable to work.	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. People who cannot find work should be required to work at public service jobs to earn cash benefits.	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. We should improve and equalize educational opportunities for all Americans.	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. Americans who have what they need should help those who do not.	☐	☐	☐	☐
e. More public money should be spent on preventing poverty in the first place.	☐	☐	☐	☐
f. Government should not support anyone who can work.	☐	☐	☐	☐

3. Are there any other principles that you think should guide public policy dealing with welfare? Please explain.

_____

_____

_____

4. How concerned are you about the issues listed below?	Very concerned	Somewhat concerned	Not at all concerned	Not sure
a. If we do not invest more in preventing poverty, the need for welfare will persist.	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Welfare supports people who make bad choices by taking drugs or having babies they cannot support.	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. Welfare to work programs do not serve the very young and very old, the disabled, and the mentally ill.	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. Too many welfare parents lack the financial, educational, and moral resources to help their children escape poverty.	☐	☐	☐	☐
e. Dependence on welfare robs people of incentives to help themselves.	☐	☐	☐	☐
f. There are simply not enough jobs for the welfare recipients who need them.	☐	☐	☐	☐

Pre-Forum Questionnaire

5. Do you have any other concerns about public policy in this area? Please explain.

_____

_____

_____

6. How do you feel about these approaches to making policy on welfare issues?	Favor	Oppose	Not sure
a. We should require every able person to work, EVEN IF this means leaving small children in day care and older children on their own.	☐	☐	☐
b. Private charities must do more to help those who cannot care for themselves, EVEN IF this is just another form of welfare.	☐	☐	☐
c. We should invest in long-term educational and social programs to prevent poverty, EVEN IF this leads to neglect of those presently in need.	☐	☐	☐

7. Which statement best describes how you feel? **(Please mark only one answer.)**
   - a. I am not at all certain what our public policy on welfare should be. ☐
   - b. I have a general sense of what our public policy on welfare should be. ☐
   - c. I have a definite opinion of what our public policy should be. ☐

8. Are you male or female? ☐ Male ☐ Female

9. How much schooling have you completed?
   ☐ Less than 6th grade ☐ 6th–8th grade ☐ Some high school ☐ High school graduate
   ☐ Some college ☐ College graduate ☐ Graduate school

10. Are you:
    ☐ White ☐ African-American ☐ Hispanic ☐ Asian-American
    ☐ Other (specify) _____

11. How old are you?
    ☐ 17 or younger ☐ 18–29 ☐ 30–49 ☐ 50–64 ☐ 65 or older

12. Have you attended an NIF forum before? ☐ Yes ☐ No

13. If you answered "yes" to #12, how many forums have you attended? ☐ 1–3 ☐ 4–6 ☐ 7 or more

14. Do you live in the:
    ☐ Northeast ☐ South ☐ Midwest ☐ West
    ☐ Southwest ☐ Other

15. What is your ZIP code? _____

Please give this form to the forum leaders, or mail it to
National Issues Forums, 100 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459-2777

From Welfare to Work

Who Should We Help and How?

People get involved in National Issues Forums partly because they want elected and appointed officials to know how they feel about the issues. Each year, NIF reports what you say to local and national leaders. Please answer the questions below AFTER you read this book and attend a forum. Fill in the same three-digit number you used on the Pre-Forum Questionnaire here: ☐.

1. Here is a list of principles on which proposals for reforming welfare might be based. How important do you think each one should be in making public policy on welfare?	Very important	Somewhat important	Not at all important	Not sure
a. Government should provide for the basic needs of those who are unable to work.	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. People who cannot find work should be required to work at public service jobs to earn cash benefits.	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. We should improve and equalize educational opportunities for all Americans.	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. Americans who have what they need should help those who do not.	☐	☐	☐	☐
e. More public money should be spent on preventing poverty in the first place.	☐	☐	☐	☐
f. Government should not support anyone who can work.	☐	☐	☐	☐

2. Look at the list in Question #1 again. How strongly is each principle actually reflected in our current policies?	Strongly	Somewhat strongly	Not at all	Not sure
a. Government should provide for the basic needs of those who are unable to work.	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. People who cannot find work should be required to work at public service jobs to earn cash benefits.	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. We should improve and equalize educational opportunities for all Americans.	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. Americans who have what they need should help those who do not.	☐	☐	☐	☐
e. More public money should be spent on preventing poverty in the first place.	☐	☐	☐	☐
f. Government should not support anyone who can work.	☐	☐	☐	☐

3. Are there any other principles that you think should guide public policy dealing with welfare? Please explain.

_____

_____

_____

4. How concerned are you about the issues listed below?	Very concerned	Somewhat concerned	Not at all concerned	Not sure
a. If we do not invest more in preventing poverty, the need for welfare will persist.	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Welfare supports people who make bad choices by taking drugs or having babies they cannot support.	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. Welfare to work programs do not serve the very young and very old, the disabled, and the mentally ill.	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. Too many welfare parents lack the financial, educational, and moral resources to help their children escape poverty.	☐	☐	☐	☐
e. Dependence on welfare robs people of incentives to help themselves.	☐	☐	☐	☐
f. There are simply not enough jobs for the welfare recipients who need them.	☐	☐	☐	☐

Post-Forum Questionnaire

5. Do you have any other concerns about public policy in this area? Please explain.

_____

_____

_____

6. How do you feel about these policy-making approaches concerning the U.S. work force?	Favor	Oppose	Not sure
a. We should require every able person to work, EVEN IF this means leaving small children in day care and older children on their own.	☐	☐	☐
b. Private charities must do more to help those who cannot care for themselves, EVEN IF this is just another form of welfare.	☐	☐	☐
c. We should invest in long-term educational and social programs to prevent poverty, EVEN IF this leads to neglect of those presently in need.	☐	☐	☐

7. Which statement best describes how you feel? **(Please mark only one answer.)**

a. I am not at all certain what our public policy on welfare should be. ☐

b. I have a general sense of what our public policy should be. ☐

c. I have a definite opinion of what our public policy should be. ☐

8. What is your ZIP code? _____

What Are the National Issues Forums?

National Issues Forums bring together citizens around the nation to discuss challenging social and political issues of the day. They have addressed issues such as the economy, education, health care, foreign affairs, poverty, and crime.

Thousands of civic, service, and religious organizations, as well as libraries, high schools, and colleges, have sponsored forums. The sponsoring organizations select topics from among each year's most pressing public concerns, then design and coordinate their own forum programs, which are held through the fall, winter, and spring.

A different kind of talk

No two forums are alike. They range from small study circles to large gatherings modeled after town meetings, but all are different from everyday conversations and adversarial debates.

Since forums seek to increase understanding of complicated issues, participants need not start out with detailed knowledge of an issue. Forum organizers distribute issue books such as this one, featuring a nonpartisan overview of an issue and a choice of several public responses. By presenting each issue in a nonpartisan way, forums encourage participants to take a fresh look at the issues and at their own convictions.

In the forums, participants share their opinions, their concerns, and their knowledge. With the help of moderators and the issue books, participants weigh several possible ways for society to address a problem. They analyze each choice, the arguments for and against it, and the trade-offs and other implications of the choice. Moderators encourage participants, as they gravitate to one option or another, to examine their basic values as individuals and as community members.

The search for common ground

Forums enrich participants' thinking on public issues. Participants confront each issue head-on, make an informed decision about how to address it, and come to terms with the likely consequences of their choices. In this deliberative process, participants often accept choices that are not entirely consistent with their individual wishes and that impose costs they had not initially considered. This happens because the forum process helps people see issues from different points of view; participants use discussion to discover, not persuade or advocate. The best deliberative forums can help participants move toward shared, stable, well-informed public judgments about important issues.

Participants may hold sharply different opinions and beliefs, but in the forums they discuss their attitudes, concerns, and convictions about each issue and, as a group, seek to resolve their conflicting priorities and principles. In this way, participants move from making individual choices to making choices as members of a community — the kind of choices from which public action may result.

Building community through public deliberation

In a democracy, citizens must come together to find answers they can all live with — while acknowledging that individuals have differing opinions. Forums help people find the areas where their interests and goals overlap. This allows a public voice to emerge that can give direction to public policy.

The forums are nonpartisan and do not advocate a particular solution to any public issue, nor should they be confused with referenda or public opinion polls. Rather, the forums enable diverse groups of Americans to determine together what direction they want policy to take, what kinds of action and legislation they favor, and what, for their common good, they oppose.

Moving to action

Forums can lead to several kinds of public action. Generally, a public voice emerges in the results of the forums, and that helps set the government's compass, since forum results are shared with elected officials each year. Also, as a result of attending forums, individuals and groups may decide individually or with others to help remedy a public problem through citizen actions outside of government.

How to start a forum

Forums are initiated at the local level by civic and educational organizations. For information about starting a forum and using our materials, write the National Issues Forums Research, 100 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459-2777, or phone (800) 433-7834.

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